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Editorial

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Abstract

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In the foreword to his novel *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao drew attention to some of the stylistic and formal problems he had had to grapple with as an Indian writing in English. How, for example, should he set about conveying in 'a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own'? and delineating in 'the language of [one's] intellectual make-up' the emotional and psychological life that is a main concern of the novel? The guiding principle, it seemed to Rao in 1938, had to consist in the reinvention of English as a vehicle for translating or transcreating from indigenous narratives (see Sujit Mukherjee in this issue), like the *sthala-purana*; and for rendering in new and distinctive forms the experiences and voices of people who, living on the subcontinent, had nevertheless 'grown to look at the large world' as part of themselves.

It will generally be agreed that the creative potential Raja Rao saw in the once 'alien' language has been richly realized in this last half century. A striking instance, to quote from Nayantara Sahgal's address given at the Honorary Degree ceremony at Leeds in July 1997, is that English is spoken more widely, 'though more idiosyncratically', in post-Independence India than it ever was under British rule. It is also constitutionally recognized as one of India's national languages. Of particular significance here, however, is the presence of a robust and burgeoning South Asian literature in English; and the increasingly prominent role English is called upon to play in translation from the diverse literatures in the regional languages and from established literary traditions.

On the fiftieth anniversary of Pakistan and Indian Independence, this issue of *Kunapipi* celebrates, albeit in a modest way, the subcontinent's cultural vitality and creativity. Combining fiction, poetry, essays, criticism, works in translation and in English, its contents tell of the tragic lessons of history along with the small defeats and consolations of everyday existence; the pervasiveness of social injustice and cruelty as well as the ordinary person's courage in the fight for freedom and agency; the undimmed vigour of older traditions and continuing innovation with different forms and ways of speaking; memories of the old homeland amid the realities of life in the new.

My special thanks are to the contributors who have made this issue possible – people I have known and worked with and read over the years as well as new friends; to Glenda Pattenden for shrewd advice and sharp-eyed editing; and to Anna Rutherford and *Kunapipi* for the space to work in.